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ON PAGE 6A

Eden Pastora's 1978 raid created rebel mystique

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The raid led by Eden Pastora Gomez on the Nicaraguan national palace in August 1978 was a publicity coup. It often has been cited as the turning point leading to the Sandinista victory in the Nicaraguan revolution against dictator Anastasio Somoza.

Since the palace raid Pastora — known as Commandante Zero — has been as baffling outside Nicaragua as he was inside. The former Sandinista commander became a foe of the Sandinista government.

It was almost five years ago that Pastora suddenly became famous for the raid. Prior to that he was an unknown medical student and a businessman.

The rebels — wearing hoods and looking very sinister as well as serious — took as hostages legislators serving under Somoza. During the three days they held the palace, they also captured the imagination of Nicaraguans, which turned out to be more important to the Sandinistas than the hostages themselves.

Commandante Zero became deputy defense minister, chief of the national militia of the Sandinista government.

In July 1981, saying he was "following the smell of gunpowder," Pastora left Nicaragua to pursue revolution in other lands.

In April 1982, he broke with the Sandinista government and became leader of the military forces of the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance. He announced that he had become an enemy of his former comrades who, he said, were selling out the Nicaraguan revolution to Cuban military advisers and agents of other communist countries.

And just last April, Pastora announced he was re-entering Nicara-

gua to head another guerilla band. He had been staying in Costa Rica, where he recently returned.

"A true revolution will be hard and it will require unity, but it is the only way to gain liberty and democracy," Pastora said.

His DRA and the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN), the group of rebels based in Honduras, have been the two major forces opposing the Nicaraguan government.

"My men go hungry," Pastora said last week in announcing his latest move. "They don't have the rifles and I have only \$3,000 in my pocket," he said. "You can't make war that way."

The main reason he is short of money is because he has not had good relations with the United States, which prefers, supports and funds the FDN.

One reason the United States has not put its money on Pastora is that he has in the past had contacts with Fidel Castro and with Col. Muammar Qaddafi of Libya. Also, he has refused to deal with the CIA.

According to Nicaraguan leaders, Pastora could not get the men and arms

he needed because the Nicaraguan people are backing the present government. Whatever his reasons for announcing the withdrawal of his forces, Pastora is not being counted out by those who believe he is merely biding his time before taking up the fight again.

Some have felt Pastora could have done more damage to the Nicaraguan economy if he had been fighting in the agriculture-rich north instead of the south.

One opposition leader said Pastora "was a hope" for those opposing the Sandinista government because he was "the one who could have won over the military, the paramilitary and the civic groups."

Dr. Cesar Degadillo, who heads the Nicaraguan Social Christian Party and is a supporter of the government, said Pastora "is a person who more than anything likes publicity."

Alfonso Callejas, a director of the FDN, said Pastora is unstable and "is not a serious person politically."

Both may be right — but perhaps only until Commandante Zero's next coup.